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A Look At Kronstadt 1921

By James R Hinchee

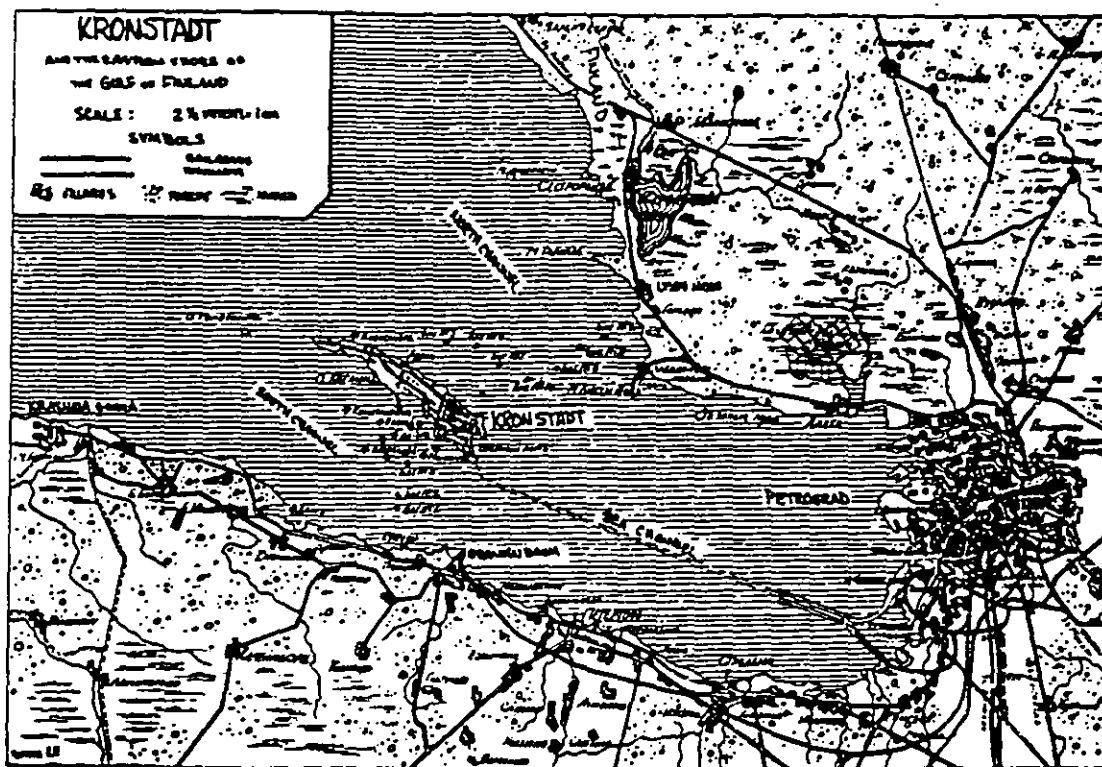
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History 492

Professor Edward O'Day

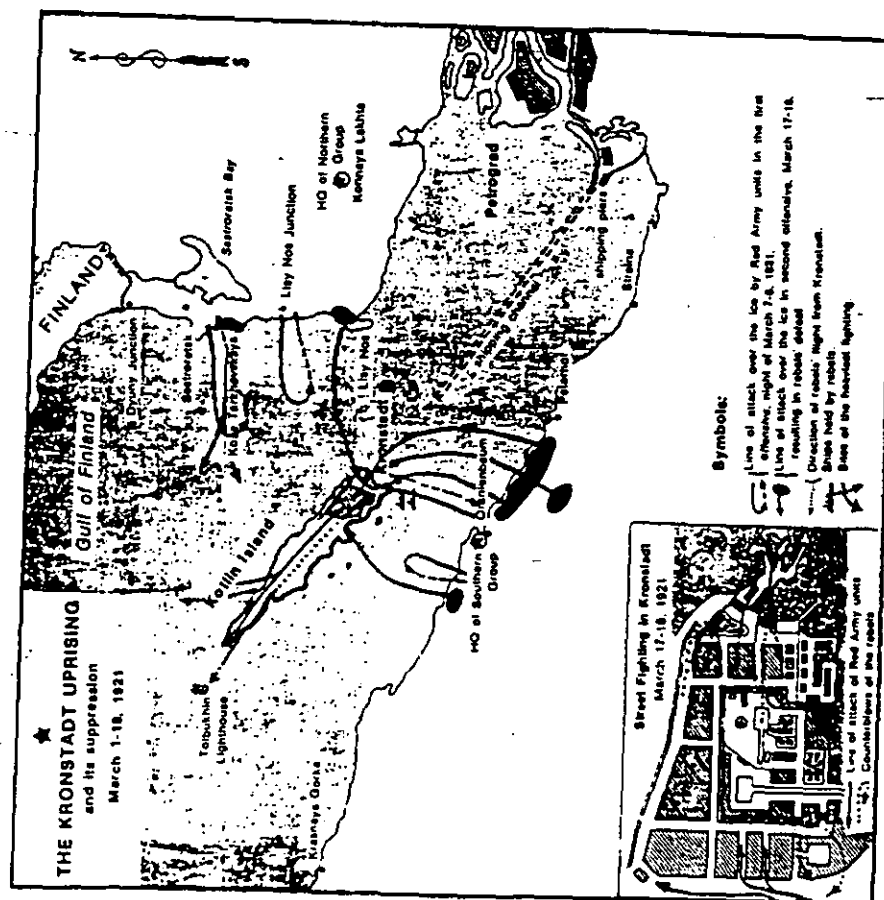
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(Voline, 440)



This map was published in *Kak vooruzhajas' revoliutsia* (How the Revolution Armed Itself), vol. 3, book 1. It was translated by George Saunders.

(Lenin, 4)

Every ruler makes enemies. [There are no exceptions.] ...If one chooses sides on emotion, then the Rebel is the guy to go with. He is fighting for everything men claim to honor: freedom, independence, truth, the right ... all the subjective illusions, all the eternal trigger-words. ...

There are no self-proclaimed villains only regiments of self-proclaimed saints. Victorious historians rule where good or evil lies.

-- Glen Cook, The Black Company

The Bolsheviks did not have a monopoly on revolution nor were they the predominant force during the February Revolution in 1917. The Bolsheviks represented only a small, though important, political group of the ultra-extreme left. On the left they were rivalled by another political group, often overlooked and forgotten, the anarchists. The anarchists were the ultra-left of the populist political tradition, while the Bolsheviks were the ultra-left of the Social Democratic or Marxist political tradition. The anarchists played an important role in Russian radical politics in the mid-19th century long before Marxism became a viable ideology in Russia. The anarchists trace their ideological origins back to the Russian emigres Bakunin and Kropotkin and to the Frenchman Proudhon. The anarchists have always been a relatively small group but they have exerted great influence in proportion to their numbers. The February Revolution was not a Bolshevik one and the October coup d'état was not a purely Bolshevik affair either. In fact virtually all of the extreme leftist parties, Left Social Revolutionaries (SRs), Mensheviks, and anarchists, were eager to be rid of Kerensky and his Provisional Government.

The anarchists were strongest in Petrograd and its surrounding territory and in the Ukraine. In each of these centers of influence the anarchists have their own story to tell that is in many ways different from the Bolshevik perspective on the same events. In particular, two events are often cited as being in some way purely anarchist: The activities of Nestor Makhno in the Ukraine and the Kronstadt Rebellion of 1921. While Makhno is often brushed aside and forgotten by everyone except the anarchists, the Kronstadt Rebellion remains a hotly disputed event by all sides of the political spectrum. In 1921 the defeated adversaries of the Bolsheviks were all quick to declare the rebellion to be theirs by inspiration, the supposed Third Revolution. Who were the anarchists and what role did they play in regard to Kronstadt? What happened at Kronstadt that makes the event so important? Who really was responsible for the rebellion? What is the anarchist perspective and how did it differ from the Bolshevik's? These are the questions that will be answered in the following pages.

To begin, one needs to understand the setting. Geography and various demographic factors are important to the understanding of the Kronstadt incident. Kronstadt is a city situated on the 12 X 3 kilometer Kotlin Island in the Finnish Gulf, 30 kilometers west of Petrograd. It is the principal base of the Baltic Fleet. Kotlin Island is strewn with fortifications and artillery batteries. The docks are on the east side, in the city, closest to Petrograd. The island is surrounded by forts and batteries all around the bay to the north and south. Krasnaia Gorka is 20 kilometers to the southwest. Lissy Noss is 10 kilometers to the north. Kronstadt, the bay forts, and numerous small fortresss in the bay were all carefully designed to defend

Petrograd; Kronstadt was to be the centerpiece. (Voline, 441) The fortifications were formidable.

The city of Kronstadt was an industrial naval town of about 82,000. This figure consists of about 20,000 soldiers, 12,000 sailors, and 50,000 civilians most of whom were factory workers. By 1921, after numerous detachments had been sent to fight the civil war, the population fell to around 50,000, while the composition did not change significantly. There were around 27,000 sailors and soldiers at the time of the 1921 uprising. The nature of this force is unique to the Russian military. The needs of the modern Russian navy under the Tsar required a literate and very skilled sailor. Hence, about 84% were literate and most were recruited from the working class. Three of four sailors came from the urban proletariat, which was quite the opposite of the predominant peasant background of the regular soldier in the army. The army of 1917 only drew about 3% of its recruits from industrial backgrounds. (Getzler 7,10,205) By 1921, the composition of Kronstadt changed to a more pronounced peasant background and drawn from the Ukraine and the Baltics.

The situation throughout Russia in late 1920 and early 1921 was one of desperation for the people. The Civil War was winding down. The great White armies and foreign interventionists had been largely defeated. The country was on the edge of economic collapse, shortage of all goods were rampant. Starvation lurked around all corners. During 1920 Russia suffered a severe drought and the winter proved to be especially harsh. Sporadic peasant uprisings were erupting all over Russia, especially in the Ukraine, the Tambov region and Siberia, where the uprisings and subsequent suppressions were often brutal. (Avrich,

13-16) The peasants were rising against a Bolshevik policy known as War Communism. The Bolsheviks had a standing policy of forced requisitioning which was practiced with vast local abuse. Despite the fact that civil war was winding down, the Bolsheviks did not feel themselves to be in a secure position, since civil war could easily start again and might turn the peasant masses against the dictatorship of the proletariat. In stark contrast to the rest of Russia and Petrograd, two observers, Ieronymos Yasinsky, a party lecturer, and Skoromnyi, a sailor, recalled that Kronstadt was prosperous and in good order in the fall of 1920. (Getzler, 208)

The strikes in Petrograd during February were just one of many causes that inspired the Kronstadt Rebellion. The bitter discontent of the sailors against the Bolsheviks began in the summer of 1920. In June Trotsky appointed Fiodor Raskolnikov as Commander of the Baltic Fleet with the purpose of restoring the integrity of the fleet. The appointment itself was controversial in the sense that the Bolsheviks imposed their authority over the Kronstadt Soviet by appointing officials that were not the chosen representatives of the sailors. Since 1918 the Bolsheviks had been slowly enforcing their will upon the sailors who, in 1917, had virtually declared their independence from Russia. With some mumbling, Raskolnikov was accepted, if for no other reason than as a necessary consequence of the civil war, which was still being waged at the time.

Upon appointment, Raskolnikov replaced two-thirds of the commanding officers and party leaders with his chosen favorites, from the days he served in the Caspian Sea. The replacements introduced an element of ethnic unrest as most of these new replacements were of Eastern origin.

To make matters worse, Raskolnikov implemented changes in the form of privilege. Thus Raskolnikov and his officers got the best rations, the best housing, the best clothing and enjoyed various social privileges, all above and beyond what they really needed. They flaunted it too at the expense of others. In December 1920, food shortages finally hit Kronstadt but Raskolnikov and his favorites were never short of fuel or food. The ire of the sailors was tremendous, reminding the few veterans of 1917 of the late Admiral Viren under the Tsar. Other measures were also reminiscent of Adm. Viren: the overtly harsh discipline, the restricted freedom of movement, the prohibition to gather or organize and the weak effort to isolate the sailors from unofficial propaganda. Raskolnikov used the Tcheka to root out undesirable SR's, Mensheviks, and anyone else that the Bolsheviks did not approve of. This policy of political intolerance ran smack into sailor expectations. Part of the program developed among the revolutionaries in 1917 was an open system of multiparty government in the soviet. The Bolsheviks charged those arrested with counter-revolutionary sympathies if not outright conspiracy. The sailors were not sympathetic to counter-revolutionaries, but the parties of the left were never counter-revolutionary in the sailors' eyes. (Getzler 210-212)

Not only did Raskolnikov alienate the sailors but he got into trouble with Petrograd. As part of his policy to restructure the Baltic Fleet, he sought to bring the Petrograd naval base under his authority. Gregori Zinoviev, who was the Bolshevik party boss in Petrograd, would have nothing of it. Trotsky and Zinoviev were fierce rivals at the time and Raskolnikov was Trotsky's man. Kronstadt then became a victim of that conflict. Zinoviev did not want anything to do with Raskolnikov.

As a result of this conflict, Raskolnikov's efforts to reconstruct the integrity of the Baltic Fleet failed by the end of January 1921.

(Getzler 211-212)

The discontent among the sailors was driven by more than just shortages and Raskolnikov. Just as in 1917, the soldiers and sailors were unusually concerned with the lives of the peasants. When on leave, the men would return to their homes to see and hear the latest news. They got to see Lenin's War Communism in action. Forced grain collections and illegal requisitioning were rampant throughout the countryside. Lenin knew what was going on but for the most part was unable to do much about it. Those who were caught by the Communist Party were severely punished. (Lenin, 41) Nevertheless, the soldiers and sailors only knew what they saw. The state of affairs in the countryside was pretty well known to the Kronstadters and this affected their later actions. As a result, the decline in Communist party membership accelerated. In March of 1920 membership was around 5,630, by December 1920 membership fell to 2,228. Membership to the party continued to fall as the crisis deepened. (Getzler 208-212)

Around mid-February Raskolnikov left Kronstadt and party control of Kronstadt soon collapsed. The administrative structure for the city and fleet collapsed entirely, leaving a power vacuum to be filled by the sailors. While in this state of limbo and uncertainty, events in Petrograd began to heat up. Strikes in several large factories erupted. The workers were demanding provisions and fuel. It should be noted that Communist party members and other important officials were adequately supplied during the shortages, in effect privilege was the issue. Due to the harsh winter, Petrograd and much of the north was virtually

isolated from the rest of the country. The demands of the workers, however, fell on deaf ears. Zinoviev and other officials ordered the workers back to work. Units of the Kursanti (officer cadets) and Tcheka were used to break up meetings and protests. The Party officials declared the strikes as part of a counter-revolutionary plot by Mensheviks and SRs. Petrograd became a garrisoned city virtually overnight. (Avrich Kronstadt, 45-47)

Due to Kronstadt's isolation, news of the strikes did not reach the island until February 26, 1921. The sailors were quite concerned. The sailors of the battleships Sevastopol and Petropavlovsk met and elected a fact-finding delegation of 32 men, one of which was the sailor Petrichenko, to go to Petrograd and get the story. Upon arrival, February 27, they found a city in turmoil and in a state of frightened calm. During the day several more factories suspended operations. The government ordered them back to work with little effect. Zinoviev who had organized a Committee for Defense to deal with the situation a couple days earlier, declared Martial Law in the city and lock-outs were implemented in several factories. The lock-outs had the effect of denying the workers all rations, hence condemning them to starvation. (Berkman Bolshevik, 291-292) The delegates had difficulty getting anyone to talk because many of the workers feared the local party workers and Tchekist agents. The Mensheviks, under the direction of Fiodor Dan, did take advantage of the crisis to spread leaflets condemning the Bolshevik dictatorship and demanding free election of soviets for all political parties. (Getzler, 212-213) During the crisis thousands of Mensheviks and SRs were arrested and imprisoned nationwide by the Tcheka. (Avrich Kronstadt, 47-48)

As a side note, very few anarchists had their freedom in February 1921. Most were in jail, in the Ukraine or dead. Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman, two deported Russian-American anarchists were in Petrograd at the time of the uprising. Other notable anarchists such as Voline, Aaron Baron, Maksimov, Karelina and the Gordon brothers were in prison for their political positions. The plight of the Russian anarchists received much sympathy from anarchists abroad. Though most of the leaders of the anarchists were in jail, there were thousands of people who were sympathetic to the anarchist cause or who worked with it. Perepelkin has been regarded as an anarchist and Petrichenko has been considered sympathetic. (Avrich Kronstadt, 167-170) Similar problems can be seen with the SRs of both the left and right. Though the SR's were not anarchists, the two followings held similar views on many issues, especially the agricultural issue. The SR-Maximalists, a faction of the SRs, seemed to lean toward the anarchists in their outlook than the regular SRs. Many SR-Maximalists still resided on Kronstadt, most notably Anatolia Lamenov. The only real difference between the SR-Maximalists and the anarchists lay in the degree of party organization and the usefulness of indiscriminant violence. Back in 1917 the Maximalist faction had only existed as part of the Non-Party group along with anarchists, though a Maximalist faction of the SRs existed long before 1917.

February 28th, the delegation returned to the battleships where a general meeting of the crews was held, Stephan Petrichenko and Piotr Perepelkin presiding. The findings of the delegation were read. The Communist leaders of Kronstadt were in attendance, Pavel Vasiliev and Andrian Zosimov. These two men both tried in vain to block the events

that were to occur. A resolution was drawn up expressing the concerns and demands of the sailors, a vote was taken and the resolution was adopted by the sailors. Vasiliev, Zosimov, and the Commisar of the Baltic Fleet, N. Kuzmin were furious. The Communists called a general gathering of all Kronstadters in Anchor Square for the next day. (Getzler 212-213) Meanwhile in Petrograd the unrest was beginning to take on a political tone. A proclamation was posted, in Petrograd, in the afternoon condemning the Bolsheviks and demanding free elections, freedoms of speech and press, freedom of assembly, and the liberation of arrested political prisoners. (Berkman Bolshevik, 292)

March 1st, in Kronstadt a massive gathering of 15-16,000 soldiers, sailors and workers gathered in Anchor Square. Mikhail Kalinin, Chairman of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets, arrived to look the situation over and speak to the people gathered. Kalinin was greeted with military honors. Accompanying him was Pavel Vasiliev and Nikolai Kuzmin. The mood of the crowd was extremely hostile but subdued. Apparently Kalinin noticed the mood of the crowd, and suggested that the meeting be moved indoors to the Naval Manage where the crowd would be smaller. The crowd quickly refused demanding that if something important needed to be stated then it could be spoken in the square. The various accounts of this gathering are mixed but clearly the sailors were in no mood to compromise and neither was Kalinin. After a harsh shouting match between the Communists and the people gathered, Perepelkin moved to adopt the resolution drawn up the previous day. The motion was seconded by Petrichenko and put to a vote immediately in front of the Communist officials. The resolution was adopted unanimously with Vasiliev, Kuzmin and Kalinin each opposed.

Kalinin denounced the resolution as counter-revolutionary and made clear that the Soviet Union was not about to let Kronstadt go without a fight. The resolution adopted is as follows:

"Resolution of the General Meeting of the 1st and 2nd Squadrons of the Baltic Fleet, held on March 1st, 1921.

"After having heard the reports of the delegates sent to Petrograd by the general meeting of the crews to examine the situation, the assembly decided that, since it has been established that the present Soviets do not express the will of the workers and peasants, it is necessary:

1. to proceed immediately to the re-election of the Soviets by secret ballot, the electoral campaign among workers and peasants to be carried on with full freedom of speech and action;

2. to establish freedom of speech and press for all workers and peasants, for the Anarchists and Left Socialist parties;

3. to accord freedom of assembly to the workers' and peasants' organisations;

4. to convoke, outside of the political parties, a Conference of the workers, Red soldiers and sailors of Petrograd, Kronstadt and the Petrograd province for March 10th, 1921, at the latest;

5. to liberate all Socialist political prisoners and also all workers, peasants, Red soldiers and sailors, imprisoned as a result of the workers' and peasants' movements;

6. to elect a commission for the purpose of examining the cases of those who are in prisons or concentration camps;

7. to abolish the 'political offices', since no political party should have privileges for propagating its ideas or receive money from the State for this purpose, and to replace them with educational and cultural commissions elected in each locality and financed by the government;

8. to abolish immediately all [intrastate] barriers [to trade];

9. to make uniform the rations of all workers, except for those engaged in occupations dangerous to their health;

10. to abolish the Communist shock-troops in all units of the army and the Communist guards in the factories; in case of need, guard

detachments could be supplied in the army by the companies and in the factories by the workers;

11. to give the peasants full freedom of action in regard to their land and also the right to possess cattle, on condition that they do their own work, that is to say, without hiring help;

12. to establish a travelling control commission;

13. to permit the free exercise of handicrafts, provided no hired help is used;

14. we ask all units of the army and the Kursanti cadets to join our resolution;

15. we demand that all our resolutions be widely publicised in the press.

This resolution was adopted unanimously by the meeting of the crews of the two Squadrons. Two persons abstained.

Signed: Petrichenko, president of the meeting; Perepelkin, secretary."

(Voline, 473-475)

In looking at clause 2 one will notice that the freedoms of speech and of the press are only to be given to the various leftist parties. Voline suggests that the Kronstadters were, from the very beginning, very concerned about the dangers of misunderstanding by outsiders. As would be later seen, the Bolsheviks were quick to accuse Kronstadt of being guided by reactionary elements. The fact that the resolution only called for partial freedoms of speech and the press is, perhaps, a reflection of this concern, but this conclusion is uncertain at best. (Voline, 473) The conference called for was never held nor were elections to the Kronstadt Soviet ever held. This was perhaps acceptable in light of the events that took place.

Back in Petrograd, the Tcheka had arrested large numbers of people. The trade unions were being liquidated but the unrest continued. Zinoviev is reported to have called on Moscow for military reinforcements to support the unreliable forces in the province.

Extraordinary Martial Law was declared in Petrograd. (Berkman Bolshevik, 292-293) At the same time roadblocks were lifted to permit freer trade which suddenly provided the town with generous provisions of food and clothing. (Getzler, 221) Other concessions were being prepared.

March 2nd, a Conference of Delegates was held in Kronstadt with equal representation for all interests. Three-hundred-three delegates attended, with Petrichenko presiding. The business of the meeting consisted of establishing a temporary Provisional Revolutionary Committee to manage the situation until elections for the Soviet could be held. The Committee was made up of a 5 member Presidium, to be later expanded to 15 members on March 4th. The members included: Petrichenko, a sailor; Yakovenko, who was a telephone operator; Oreshin, who was a teacher at the third Technical School, perhaps the only one to be part of the Intelligentsia; Tugin, who was an electrician; and Arkhipov, who was a mechanic. With the exception of Oreshin, all 15 members of the Committee were of Proletarian backgrounds. (Voline, 488) Kuzmin and Vasiliev were both present at the Conference and sternly warned again that the Communists were not about to let Kronstadt go without a struggle. The Committee took them seriously and had them promptly arrested. Kalinin, who was still in town, was allowed to return to Petrograd. The issue of how to deal with the remaining Communists on the island was discussed. They were free to join the Conference if they desired, the others were allowed to leave if they chose. It should be noted that large numbers of Party members did defect to the Kronstadt cause. The publication of the Kronstadt newspaper, Izvestia was also established during the Conference.

Of particular interest is a rumor that got started at the Conference. The rumor claimed that the Communists had truckloads of armed soldiers already on the way to break up the meeting. It was only a rumor but at the time the delegates took it seriously and got whipped into a frenzy. A quick decision was made to seize all important facilities of the island and of the various forts around the Gulf. All but Krasnaia Gorka and Oranienbaum were seized and not a shot fired. It has been argued that the Kronstadters were, in fact, the first to take offensive military action as a result of the March 2nd decision, not the Bolsheviks. The real question should be directed to the origins of the rumor. Mystery surrounds it. The rumor seems too conveniently laid and it did succeed in further polarizing the situation. Was there perhaps a conspiracy to cause trouble? No evidence exists to prove it one way or the other.

News of what was happening in Russia was getting out abroad. Victor Chernov, the former Chairman of the Constituent Assembly, offered to provision Kronstadt with the help of Russian emigres. The SR party in Russia likewise offered to aid Kronstadt in any way necessary. The Provisional Revolutionary Committee (PRC) turned down the offers until circumstances changed but they would keep them in mind. (Berkman Kronstadt, 16) Alfred Rosmer points out that the foreign press became exultant. The exiled emigres and the foreign press were all eager to join in on the side of Kronstadt without even considering the program that the sailors had to offer. To the emigres, all that mattered was overthrowing the Bolsheviks. The event was hailed as the Third Revolution by anarchists and others abroad. (Frank, 16-17) As such, plans were being made to seize the moment once the ice started to melt

in the Gulf. The Bolsheviks knew very well what the emigres were up to, but it is not at all clear if Kronstadt knew.

Back in Petrograd, March 2, Kalinin and Zinoviev set about isolating the island with the help of loyal Kursanti cadets and the Peterhof Battalion. The strikes were more or less subdued by force and by concessions of provisions that were rushed in to alleviate worker demands. In Moscow, Lenin and Trotsky (Trotsky had been recalled from Siberia where he had been suppressing peasant uprisings) issued the first official announcement. The statement declared the disturbance as counter-revolutionary and instigated by the French and White guard emigres. The Petropavlovsk Resolution was regarded as being an SR-Black Hundred resolution. General Kozlovsky was accused of being in charge of the uprising in Kronstadt. (Lenin, 67) An element of truth does exist in the statement issued. The French did know about the uprising. There was a General Kozlovsky in Kronstadt, who had served under the Tsar. His role was, however, rather passive. He was in charge of the artillery and had been assigned to the Baltic Fleet by Trotsky a few years back. Upon Commissar Kuzmin's arrest, Kozlovsky was supposed to have succeeded him. Yet General Kozlovsky refused the position of Commisar. He supposedly strongly recommended that the sailors take the offensive immediately and seize Oranienbaum. Oranienbaum was of strategic importance for its surprise potential and for the 50,000 poods of food that were stored there for the fleet. Kronstadt only had two weeks worth of rations on the island at the start of the uprising. Nevertheless, the PRC refused the recommendation. Beyond the initial advice, Gen. Kozlovsky served no important role in Kronstadt's uprising.

Even so, the Bolsheviks used him and his immediate aides for a very successful though false propaganda campaign. (Voline, 485-487)

March 3rd, Izvestia started publishing the newspaper for Kronstadt. The editor was Anatolli Lamanov. He was an SR-Maximalist and his political views supported the maxim of 'all power to the soviets and not to political parties'. It is in the pages of Izvestia that he and Perepelkin set about promoting their ideas and publishing the workings of the PRC. (Getzler, 229-230) Fourteen issues were printed during the two week affair and it is from these issues that author's of the various secondary works cited got much of their information. The PRC spent the day working on getting matters organized on the island itself. Elections were held for various positions in the factories and in the military. Housing needs were looked into.

It is on March 3rd that the propaganda war got fully underway. Berkman does not record anything terribly significant other than that word of Kronstadt had finally gotten around to the general population of Petrograd. The Bolsheviks were using everything in their power to convince the people that the sailors had erred and that they should surrender immediately. A long radio message was broadcast from Moscow repeating the same condemnation of the sailors. (Voline, 482) The unrest in Petrograd had ended, though Berkman implies that it was fear and uncertainty that kept matters silent. Kronstadt's Izvestia claimed that unrest was still gripping Petrograd and expressed hope that the workers would rise up in rebellion. In the meantime, Kalinin and Zinoviev were waiting for reinforcements and Trotsky.

March 4th, the entire Petrograd Province was placed under martial law. More arrests took place and hostages were taken in lieu of the

arrests of Kuzmin and Vasiliev. The city's government facilities were garrisoned by loyal troops. Late that night the Petrograd Soviet met to discuss the matter. Trotsky was supposed to be there but his train was delayed by weather. The Soviet was packed with Communists but others were present. Zinoviev presided with Kalinin present. The debate appears to have been dominated by the Communists. What exactly went on during the meeting is disputed but one important conclusion can be drawn: the local Communists were not unified in their feelings toward Kronstadt. Robert Daniels claims that Kalinin felt the sailor's grievances were legitimate and their solutions even acceptable. He goes on to suggest that the Petrograd Soviet as a whole was in disagreement with Moscow on how to resolve the crisis. Moscow's decision to forcibly suppress Kronstadt was based on exaggerated descriptions of the events by Zinoviev. (Daniels, 245) Nevertheless, the Soviet did condemn the uprising as a counter-revolutionary plot and demanded that Kronstadt surrender immediately or else.

Kronstadt replied that it did not want to shed blood, that they believed in soviet style government and that there was no conspiracy afoot. The PRC declared that Kronstadt would defend itself if attacked and thus decided to arm the civilians and prepare for the defense of the island. Elections were announced for various administrative positions in the trade unions and in the Council of Unions. The Council of Unions was to represent the workers and would keep in contact with the PRC. (Voline, 494, 504)

March 5th, Trotsky arrived and issued an ultimatum to Kronstadt demanding unconditional surrender or else suffer suppression by force of arms. (Lenin, 67) Berkman felt that many Communists, whom he was on

good terms with, disbelieved that force would be used. Sergei Kamenev and Mikhail Tukhachevsky arrived with Trotsky and were assigned their roles as Commanders-in-Chief, Tukhachevsky being the senior partner. Both were former Tsarist generals. Kronstadt repeatedly pointed this fact out as a retort to the Kozlovsky accusations. Efforts to prepare for battle were begun immediately. Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman and two Russian anarchists, Perkus and Petrovsky, jointly offered a proposal to Zinoviev to create a special commission to mediate the crisis. Zinoviev accepted the proposal but nothing ever came of it. (Berkman Bolshevik, 310-302)

March 6th, battle preparations were finished. Kronstadt issued an appeal to the citizens of Petrograd. They declared their cause was just and called for delegates to be sent to find out the truth. Berkman says little more. Apparently the world was waiting for a show-down.

March 7th to March 17th, the Bolsheviks laid siege to Kronstadt and the various little forts scattered in the Gulf. The siege was a virtual war of attrition. From a strategic standpoint the sailors had the advantage of firepower and position. The Bolsheviks had superiority in numbers and supply. Had the Kronstadters waited two weeks later for the rebellion, they would have had an unfrozen Gulf to their advantage. As it was, the Bolsheviks had to attack over open ice. Of the 50,000 troops committed, 80% lost their lives. The Kronstadters defended themselves with only 15,000 men scattered over a wide front. Many of the troops the Bolsheviks sent in were Kursanti and Tcheka agents. The regular Red Army was deemed undependable. Only the most loyal troops were committed. Even so, Trotsky and Tukhachevsky took no chances and had the soldiers backed up with machine guns to prevent desertion.

March 16th the Bolsheviks entered the city and took Kronstadt by the next day. Approximately 8000 refugees escaped to Finland, including Petrichenko. What followed is largely unrecorded or unknown but supposedly many people were executed, jailed or at the very least relocated to other regions in the country. (Getzler, 243) Such was the end to the crisis. Berkman records an irony that on the 18th the Bolsheviks celebrated the anniversary of the Paris Commune. Trotsky and Zinoviev denounced those that suppressed the Commune with great slaughter. (Berkman Bolshevik, 303)

Meanwhile, on March 8th to March 16th, the Tenth Party Congress was held. Kronstadt and the dire situation throughout Russia were the prominent issues debated. Lenin addressed the Congress several times. He made great play of the White Guards and counter-revolution but he did concede on the 8th that the sailors only wanted to reform the regime with free trade and a slight shift in soviet power. He made clear that regardless of their intentions, Kronstadt was playing into the hands of White Guard counter-revolutionaries. Lenin never did refute in any way the official line. On the 15th, Lenin admitted that Kronstadt wanted neither White Guards nor the state power of the Bolsheviks. An element of truth exists in Lenin's claims as will be later examined. (Getzler, 220) During the Congress, Lenin brought forth the program that was to be later called the NEP (New Economic Policy). The actual program had had been voted on in the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party back in February 24, 1921. It is ironic that the program ratified by the Tenth Party Congress granted many of the economic demands that were made by Kronstadt, notably free trade and the end of forced requisitions. (Frank, 14) Mystery surrounds why the Bolsheviks did not just tell the

sailors that they had gotten what they wanted or, better yet, had informed the public back in February to avoid the crisis all together.

The Bolsheviks claimed that a conspiracy was underfoot in Kronstadt. If so, what was it? Evidence of a conspiracy would definitely identify the true nature and purpose of the rebellion. Robert V. Daniels, in a very interesting analysis of the rebellion, offers several points of evidence that claim no plot was afoot among the Kronstadters. (Daniels, 241-245) The first point is the matter of timing. Had the sailors waited another two weeks, the ice would have been broken up, making the island virtually impregnable and enabling resupply. Daniels claims that any conspiracy would have waited for better timing. The writer of this paper, is willing to suggest that this is not proof against conspiracy. The disease of mutiny, once it gets loose, tends to run wild. Had they waited two weeks, Tcheka agents may have gotten suspicious and may have actively worked to purge the possible mutineers. The timing also may have been right. The needs of any rebellion are that there exists a definitive potential support base. The strikes in Petrograd provided an opportunity to win support. In fact during the whole crisis Kronstadt consistently appealed to the people of Petrograd for their active support which never manifested. The sympathy of a city does not win battles -- active participation does. A conspiracy could not have depended on possible unrest in two more weeks. Furthermore, just like Kronstadt, Petrograd too, could have been relieved with outside provisioning thereby satisfying worker demands. The Bolsheviks had already decided upon the NEP as a solution.

Second, Daniels points out that Kronstadt failed to take the offensive as advised by General Kozlovsky. Again the writer of this

paper does not see how this disproves a conspiracy. A decision was made, nothing more. Certainly if the sailors had taken the offensive, events would have been very different and probably in the sailors favor. But taking the offensive would only have convinced the Bolsheviks and the people of Petrograd that there really was a White Guard conspiracy. Hence risking the support potential of Petrograd for the rebellion. By staying put, the sailors won some points in the image game and looked convincingly more like reformers than rebels. They also bought time to work out a peaceful negotiation if possible.

Third, Daniels points out that no evidence exists to suggest that the Communists in Kronstadt suspected a conspiracy before or after the revolt had begun. This point is more convincing than the previous two. The issue becomes one of the completeness of evidence. One possible relevant consideration is that on March 17th, many of the Communists that had been left free by the sailors in Kronstadt took up arms and betrayed the other sailors by fighting alongside the Bolsheviks. (Voline, 532) Perhaps the Kronstadt Communists, who were in the minority throughout the crisis, were just buying time by appeasing the PRC.

Fourth, Daniels believes that the release of Kalinin was a gesture of good will. Kalinin would have made an excellent hostage. What good are hostages? The Bolsheviks took several and the policies of the PRC did not change. How would Kalinin's arrest have changed the Bolshevik position? Why would a conspiracy bother taking Kalinin hostage? The sailors held no grudge against him personally, unlike Kuzmin and Vasiliev. Again this writer is not convinced that there was not a conspiracy. At the same time this writer feels there is no definitive

proof of a conspiracy by the sailors. Furthermore, Bolshevik claims to the effect seem to be little more than empty propaganda. The question is unresolved. (Daniels, 246-247)

Where a conspiracy among the sailors seems unresolved, conspiracy by outside parties does appear evident and was known to the Bolsheviks to some degree. The Bolsheviks knew that if they did not provision Kronstadt then sailors would have no recourse but to receive provisions from abroad. The offers made by Lev Chernov and the SRs were known to the Bolsheviks as was the PRC's response. The PRC did not totally refuse out of hand, but rather put the issue off for later. Kronstadt was strategically useful for anyone desiring to resume the civil war. A memorandum reproduced by Pierre Frank reveals that the emigres knew in advance of the potential for rebellion and were making contingency plans if it should arise. (Frank, 26-30) Plans were made to involve the French and General Wrangel's forces. Yet no provision was made for the interests of the sailors. The emigres merely assumed that they themselves would go in and displace the PRC. The Bolsheviks may have feared just this: that regardless of Kronstadt's true motives the White Armies would seize the island for their own purposes. Therefore, suppressing the rebellion before the ice thawed was imperative. (Frank, 24-32) It should be noted that once the rebellion began all the enemies of the Bolsheviks, foreign and domestic, hastened to join the sailors: Left and Right SRs, Mensheviks and anarchists. (Frank, 16)

The importance of the conspiracy issue is that it would clearly identify the nature of the rebellion. The Bolsheviks and Bolshevik apologists all appeal to evidence of conspiracy as a means of justifying Bolshevik actions. The anarchists conversely point out that no

conspiracy existed and that the ensuing battle was unjustified.

Furthermore, the anarchists appeal to the sailors' demands as being in some way good and the Bolsheviks efforts to suppress them is in some way evil. In a strange way both sides are correct.

The role and influence of the anarchists in Kronstadt remains rather mysterious. As a political group, formal organization was an anathema and as such records appear scarce. Apparently, in 1921, no known prominent anarchists were in Kronstadt. Though a few anarchists were in Petrograd, the only notable ones were Berkman and Goldman. Most of the anarchist ringleaders were dead or in jail. Some speculation exists that Perepelkin was an anarchist and that Petrichenko was very sympathetic to the anarchist cause. The SR-Maximalists were very close ideologically to the anarchists in terms of their ideal society. The Maximalists were rhetorically more in favor of indiscriminant violence to achieve their aims. Kronstadt, in 1921, was not organized along party lines during the uprising, neither did the parties figure into the political equation of the PRC. The slogan of the Kronstadters was 'Free Soviets without parties'. The communists, in general, were allowed their freedom and were the only organized political party at the time. There were numerous SR-Maximalists but an SR-Maximalist party never arose. Kronstadt was against the possibility of any party dominating so by de fault no parties emerged.

The absence of prominent anarchists does not preclude anarchist influence. Kronstadt had a tradition for being an anarchist stronghold back in 1917 with such important figures as Efim Yarchuk and I.S. Bleichman. Much of the program adopted, by Kronstadt, in 1917 had anarchist overtones much to the chagrin of the Bolsheviks. Most notable

was the insistence of the Kronstadt soviet not to submit to the authority of the Petrograd Soviet and after the October coup to the Bolsheviks. Over the course of the civil war Kronstadt had been drained of much of its revolutionary strength as units left to fight the Whites but the spirit never died. In 1921 the sailors looked back and saw what had been and knew what had been promised. Such slogans as 'all power to the soviets' remained impressed upon their minds as the veterans passed on the sailor tradition to new recruits. The program and demands of 1921, embodied in the Petropavlovsk Resolution, again had strong anarchist overtones.

The program adopted by the sailors of Kronstadt in 1921 reflected the nature of sailors. The program strongly resembled the program of 1917. To understand the program is to understand the character of the sailors themselves. The Kronstadt sailors have displayed consistent characteristics over the years. They resented privilege and authority. The sailors disliked regimentation, but they did know how to get matters taken care of when necessary. The sailors throughout the years shared dreams of local autonomy and self-administration. These characteristics manifested themselves into extreme hostility towards central government and appointed officials. Their dreams called for direct democracy in local soviets resembling the the Russian medieval veche. Kronstadt was the last of a series of rebellions against authority, all of which were spontaneous and violent. (Avrich Kronstadt, 64-65)

In looking at the Petropavlovsk Resolution reproduced above, one can examine the demands of the sailors. The list comprises both economic and political demands. The economic demands do not seem to have antagonized the Bolsheviks much, as many of them were soon to be

implemented anyway as part of what would be called the New Economic Policy. What did infuriate the Bolsheviks was the implied demand for the Bolsheviks to give up their monopoly on political power. Free elections to the soviets implied there was a chance that the Communists would fail to win the elections. Kronstadt neither wanted to abolish the soviet system nor to call back the Constituent Assembly. Local government and direct democracy was an anarchic concept as long as any authority was subject immediately to the people.

The PRC for the most part lived up to its demands. Food rationing was equalized with exceptions going to children and the ill. All positions of authority were subject to election and immediate recall. Political departments were abolished leaving no party any unfair advantage, namely the Communists. (Avrich Kronstadt, 157-159) In the factories the concept of 'workers control' was emphasized and implemented. Agricultural questions for Kronstadt were not directly relevant as the island had no significant agricultural production. Trade unions were freed from state control. Kronstadt was thoroughly against state control of any sort. (Avrich Kronstadt, 163-166)

Anarchism is strongly averse to the idea of the state, of organization that breeds authority and party organizations. The Russian anarchists proved amenable to a soviet style government (similar to New England town councils) so long as it served local interests and did not concentrate power into any group. As such, Kronstadt disavowed parties and desired freely elected soviets. Equality was another important facet of the anarchist cause. Their particular view sought to maximize personal freedom as they saw it. Equitable housing, rations and the abolishment of property were all important and were part of the

Kronstadt program, both 1917 and 1921. Freedoms of speech and press were not quite as perfect. Kronstadt only wanted these freedoms extended to those on the left. The middle class and gentry were out of luck unless they foreswore their positions. In the military, the sailors elected their commanders. Any position of authority was subject to election by those whom the position would command. Relations with other soviets were to be on an equal footing. This was true in 1917 and it was true in 1921. Demands made by others outside of Kronstadt were subject to approval by the soviet. Some of these various views were shared by the other political groups of the left but no party proclaimed to hold all of them. A strong anarchist influence did exist in Kronstadt but Kronstadt was not wholly anarchist.

Kronstadt was the nadir of a deep crisis in the life of the Soviet Union of the Bolsheviks. Who are the villains and who are the saints? Paul Avrich in Kronstadt 1921 identifies the situation best when he writes; "Kronstadt presents a situation in which the historian can sympathize with rebels and still concede that the Bolsheviks were justified in subduing them. To recognize this, is to grasp the full tragedy of Kronstadt." (Avrich, Kronstadt, 6) Likewise it is easy to feel sympathetic to the anarchists who have done much of the writing of the Kronstadt tragedy. The anarchists saw Kronstadt as their last hope for the 'Third Revolution' in Russia. Kronstadt had all of the subjective illusions and all of the eternal trigger words. The anarchists felt that the Bolsheviks had betrayed the revolution and had become exactly what they sought to crush, the counter-revolution. Berkman writes about an exchange between him and a soldier friend that had been wounded in the suppression of rebellion. The soldier recalled

the horrors of the battle that included whole battalions disappearing in the broken ice and the enormous losses of life. At the end of his account, he is quoted as saying, "In Kronstadt I learned the truth. It is we [the Bolsheviks] who were the counter-revolutionaries." (Berkman Bolshevik, 306)

The whole country was in turmoil with various other "Kronstadt" uprisings occurring all over. What made Kronstadt unique was its island fortress, the sailors, and the nature of their program. The sailors had been held in high esteem as 'the pride and joy of the Revolution.' Their revolutionary fervor in 1917 was unmatched. The Kronstadt rebellion appears not to have been a counter-revolutionary ploy, but the danger of the rebellion serving counter-revolutionary purposes did exist. The anarchists claim that the Bolsheviks were wrong in putting down the rebellion as they appealed to the sailors aims. In this regard one can sympathize with the anarchists and sailors. However, a case can be made that suggests the Bolsheviks were correct in suppressing the rebellion, if for no other reason than the danger it represented that was beyond the control of the sailors themselves. On another level one can see Kronstadt in the light of an ideological conflict between Marxism and Populism. Lenin believed in what he strove for. No other options could rightly exist in Lenin's mind. The Dictatorship of the Proletariat was to Lenin the only way to achieve true socialism. The anarchists equally believed in their cause. No real compromise existed for the two. Kronstadt was the last battle between the two revolutionary ideologies of Marxism and Anarchism. They were all self-proclaimed saints.



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